

# Utilization of Fathers' Strengths with Children in Terms of their Perceptions and Experiences

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**Abstract:** Despite the increased social interests in fathers' contribution to parenting, they tend to display rather unconfident attitudes mainly because of the pressure they are to meet in both homes and workplaces. Six fathers living in Busan and Southern Gyeongsang Province in South Korea with child(ren) participated in the study. A series of 'focus group interviews' were conducted to draw in-depth discussion among the participants to have them generate ideas and opinions while interacting. The six participants were divided into two groups, and each group had two 2-hours-long sessions, using open questionnaires developed by the researchers. The study aimed to investigate how fathers with children perceive their experience of utilizing of fathers' strengths in parenting. The results showed that the participants' perceptions toward the utilization of fathers' strengths were categorized into four aspects: i) 'full usage of strengths while parenting', ii) 'discovering strengths as fathers and succeeding in roles', iii) 'reinforcing strengths and supplementing weaknesses', and iv) 'adapting to fast-changing standards society demands for fathers'. The findings revealed the fathers' general recognition of their strengths and difficulties in parenting, which can serve as a helpful resource of improving their competencies.

In other words, efforts should be made to change social systems, resulting in reduced or flexible work hours, and longer and more autonomous maternity leave for fathers.

**Keywords:** *Fathers, Parenting, Childcare, Strengths, Positive psychology*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Rationale of the Study

In addition to the social problems related to low birth rates, social interests in fathers' participation in childcare, and demands for their roles to participate have expanded recently. However, since fathers in modern days do not necessarily meet the social standards required, they tend to suffer from observing the discrepancies occurring between the 'ideal figures' that the society seems to necessitate and their actual behavior and performance as to childcare. They are under a considerable amount of pressure of dual burdens of successfully becoming a good father at homes and a good employee at their workplaces, resulting in degrading the quality of their lives [1,2]. Such excessive stresses caused by parenting do not only negatively affect the father's level of happiness, but also that of mothers and children [3,4]. Hence, a wide range of efforts need to be implemented for fathers' successful parenting; particularly, more studies need to be conducted on methods that are designed to reduce fathers' parenting stresses and to heighten confidence that considers their both personal and psychological aspects.

According to the perspectives that positive psychology suggests, individuals possess strengths and positive qualities, they can play given roles more efficiently and become more contented in a process of utilizing the strengths [4-6]. Such programs designed to promote individuals' happiness through the exploitation of strengths have been implemented and shown its effectiveness [7-14]. South Korea has observed recent growth of researches to foster individuals' level of happiness as well

as their competencies based on their strengths.

### ***1.2. Definition of Terminologies and Relevant Studies***

Fathers' strengths refer to the competencies they possess that could help them successfully play their heir roles as a father. In other words, these strengths indicate constructive abilities fathers personally recognize, which can be attained in the context of their parenting. As for competencies fathers are required to attain, Jung and Shin (2012) [18] proposed parents' abilities to execute, and communicate, and Jung, Kang, and Ryu (2016) [19] suggested the ability to make a positive contribution as a society member, self-determination, developmental child-rearing ability, and positive parenting ability. Additionally, Lee [20] categorized fathers' participation in parenting as the following seven aspects: daily caring, interaction, instruction, going out together, emotional supports, staying together, providing time and energy.

Hong (2017) [21] suggested the greater potential of a strength-based approach, rather than a problem-solving approach, to support fathers' parenting with children, particularly by analyzing and having fathers become aware of the strengths they possess and examining its utilization. However, researches conducted on fathers' strengths with children are much limited, implying the need for studies from various approaches. In this respect, the present study attempted to provide fundamental data on fathers' strengths as well as parenting strategies by investigating how fathers with children recognize the utilization of strengths, how the utilization of strengths appears in their everyday life, and what difficulties fathers encounter as to utilizing strengths.

### ***1.3. The Implementation of Focus Group Interview Approach***

The FGI method is designed to ask its participants to generate prompt responses as they engage in a topic in which they are commonly interested. Because the participants had never met each other before the study, the researcher is to initially involve to "break the ice". Along with proper questions provided, the participants are expected to share their experiences. This approach would be able to yield a wide array of deep conversations provoked by a sense of empathy regarding their stories as fathers in parenting.

### ***1.4. Research Questions***

RQ 1. How do fathers with children recognize the exploitation of their strengths?

RQ 2. What kinds of experience do fathers with children have regarding the exploitation of their strengths?

RQ 3. What kinds of difficulties do fathers with children encounter regarding the exploitation of their strengths?

## **2. Research Method**

### ***2.1. Selection of Participants***

The study implemented a 'focus group interview' (FGI) approach as its method to conduct in-depth discussions among participant fathers with children and extract ideas and opinions during courses of interactions. To this end, the participants in the study were chosen through a 'purposive sampling' method to form a bond of sympathy; all were raising children when the study was conducted. None of the six fathers who were asked to participate in the study rejected to make their contributions. Informed consent was provided to each participant, and all acknowledged the fact that i) their names will not be revealed in the published study, ii) the recorded materials will be deleted after the research publication is completed, and iii) they are free to stop participating at any point of the study. A greater detailed description of the six participant fathers is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Backgrounds of the Participant Fathers

Group Number	Participant	Age	Children's Age and Gender	Highest Degree	Occupation	Spouse Employed
Group 1	Father 1	38	2 (Female), 3 (Male)	Master's Degree	Office Worker	No
	Father 2	41	5 (Female), 7 (Male)	Master's Degree	Office Worker	Yes
	Father 3	41	4 (Male), 6 (Female)	Doctoral Degree	Researcher	No
Group 2	Father 4	43	4 (Male), 7 (Male)	Associate Degree	Office Worker	Yes
	Father 5	43	3 (Female), 7 (Male)	Bachelor's Degree	Office Worker	Yes
	Father 6	48	3 (Female), 3 (Male)	Bachelor's Degree	Researcher	No

## 2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Two focus group interview sessions were conducted per group, taking approximately two hours per session. For an interview tool, an open questionnaire was implemented that Kruger & Casey (2000) [22] suggested: i) imposing questions, ii) introductory questions, iii) major questions, and iv) concluding questions. Followed by a preliminary interview, a researcher revised orders and contents of the questions that appeared before conducting focus group interviews. The researchers were generally convinced that this sequence would be able to promote the participants' active discussion during the interview sessions.

Analysis of the interviews was conducted based on transcription data that were recorded during each session. To enhance the reliability and validity of the qualitative data analysis, a triangulation means was adopted. Two participants with a master's degree and a doctoral degree were selected as research assistants to confirm the veracity of the discussion contents, followed by two early childhood education professors reviewing collected data.

Additionally, Willis and colleagues (2008) [23] suggested that analysis of focus group data needs to involve observing three "layers" of discussions: the individual, the group, and the group interaction, which are not considered as "steps" of the examination for researchers. The borderline between two layers is rather vague, making it hard to separate them from each other. Hence, the researchers attempted to follow the guidelines provided by Willis et. al. to generate more in-depth analysis.

**Table 2.** Guideline when Analyzing Focus Group Data [23]

Group component	An aspect of interaction for analysis
What?	What topics/opinions produced consensus (agreement)? What statement seemed to evoke conflict? What were the contradictions in the discussion? What common experience was expressed? Did the collective interaction generate new insights or precipitate an exchange of information among the participants?
Who?	Whose interests were being represented in the group? Was a sense of alliances formed among the participants? Was a particular member or viewpoint silenced?
How?	How closely did the group adhere to the issues presented for the discussion? How did the participants respond to the ideas of others? How did the group resolve disagreements? How were emotions handled, if any occurred? How were non-verbal signs and behaviors used to contribute to the discussion?

### 3. Results and Analysis

#### 3.1. How Fathers with Children Perceive the Utilization of Strengths

The participant fathers mostly agreed on the need to utilize their strengths while raising their children, recognizing their strengths as sources they could use successfully playing their father roles. On the other hand, the participants reported that rather than focusing only on strengths, efforts should be made to supplement weaknesses; they also stated a need to adapt to new social standards of being 'a good father' as such requirements change swiftly in the modern society.

**Table 3.** Analysis on How Fathers with Children Perceive the Utilization of Strengths

Category	Statement	Date	Participant
Sufficiently utilizing strengths for parenting	"I suppose that taking advantage of my strengths as a father would make the most of my strengths when I'm with my children. I'm a quiet person, but I'm good at finding information and collecting data. So, if there's anything my children are curious about, we search it together, visit there, and collect pictures and play. My children seem to be having a lot of fun, and it was fun for them to do what I'm good at."	January 26, 2018	Father 2
Recognizing strengths as a father, and playing the role successfully	"I should focus more on what I am good at as my children's father and use it [the strengths] when raising my children. If my children get satisfied and I feel that I am a good father, that's a good use of my strengths."	January 26, 2018	Father 4
Strengthening the strengths, and supplementing the weaknesses	"It could be a matter of how we perceive the problems from different angles. Instead of focusing much on what I'm good at, I think enhancing my weaknesses is more important. When my children observe me trying to overcome my weaknesses, they could consider that as fathers' strengths."	January 24, 2018	Father 1
Adapting to the required strengths that constantly change	"I think the definition of fathers' strengths change very fast as generations go by. In the past, fathers who earn much money seemed to be a good one, even if they were not friendly. But these days, fathers need to play well with [their] children, go camping occasionally, cook for the family, etc. So, more aspects could be considered as their strengths. I think we need to adapt ourselves to such changes."	February 12, 2018	Father 6

#### 3.2. Experiences in Utilization of Strengths of Fathers with Children

The participant fathers found themselves capable and satisfied as they utilize their strengths to the fullest when parenting, and experienced that the types of strengths change depending on the children's age. The fathers appeared to attempt to gain a sense of happiness as they recognize different strengths each spouse possesses and reduce the parenting burden together. They also found a need for recognizing and respecting their children's strengths as well.

**Table 4.** Analysis on How Fathers with Children Utilized their Strengths

Category	Statement	Date	Participant
Utilizing strengths to the fullest	"I think my strengths are apparent when I play with [my] kids. I have an active personality that helps me socialize with others very well. Even when I'm tired, I tend to play harder than [my] kids when they want me to do so. My spouse often says that I looked more excited than [my] kids."	February 12, 2018	Father 3
Changing definitions of strengths depending on the children's age	"According to the test results, my strengths are love, sociability, and honesty. When my children were very young, I usually loved and hugged them often. But when they went to kindergarten, they started fighting with [their] friends and lying. So I had to use much energy to discipline them to be law-abiding and to get along with the others [in a harmonized fashion]. I suppose that it's one thing I can do better than my wife."	January 24, 2018	Father 6
Gaining a sense of happiness with the spouse's strengths	"My wife and I are very different; my strengths are being a little bit tolerant and comfortable, my wife is very rigorous and organized. So, when I play with [my] kids, I play the 'good' roles; when I have to scold them or set limits on something, my wife does a great job on it. It was not like we made plans for each other in advance, but the roles became naturally divided. I think it's comfortable for me and effective for parenting."	January 24, 2018	Father 3
Strengths becoming challenges for the children	"I'm a little worried about using my strengths a lot. I like my strong points, but I have a question about whether it would be good for my kids. In fact, my younger child seems to be very uncomfortable with my humor. It's unclear how to leverage [my] strengths [for my children]."	February 16, 2018	Father 2

### 3.3. Difficulties Fathers Experience regarding Utilization of Strengths

Due to the lack of knowledge and experience related to parenting, the participant fathers appeared to have difficulties in recognizing utilizing their strengths while raising their children. It was also evident that the fathers acknowledged the importance of understanding the difference between the spouses and each other's supports. They found it significant that society spreads out an atmosphere in which fathers could live a balanced life at work and at home.

**Table 5.** Difficulties Fathers Experience regarding Utilization of Strengths

Category	Statement	Date	Participant
Parenting as an unfamiliar occupation	"I was scared when my kids were born. I never learned what dads are supposed to do. The images of my father that I remember are those I gained after I grew up [not when I was in my child's age]. As a result, I lose confidence and it's hard to find what I'm good at. I don't think there is any."	February 16, 2018	Father 5

The stereotype that a spouse has	“I don’t think my spouse recognizes my strengths. Well, she does, but she says that my strengths are not the strengths when it comes to parenting. Because she focuses on my weaknesses, I become hesitant when I try new things for my kids. I want someone to tell me how spouses can respect each other’s strengths.”	January 26, 2018	Father 2
Disequilibrium between work and parenting	“In my head, I know what needs to be done for good results, but it’s very hard to do it in reality. Even if get off work on time, I often take things home to work on. My boss doesn’t like it when I go home early to see my kids; taking paternity leave is like a dream to me. I hope someone will give a chance to show my strengths to my kids.”	February 16, 2018	Father 5

#### 4. Discussion

There are a few implications the study proposes. First, parenting-related educational programs need to be designed based on a strength-based approach, rather than taking a problem-solving perspective, so that they help fathers to enhance their self-efficacy as they play their roles, resulting in their psychological stability. To this end, a wide range of studies on specific methods that utilize strengths is required.

Second, to promote parenting-related educational programs designed for fathers, it is necessary to provide a sufficient amount of time for couples to understand, share, and respect the strengths they have. Generally speaking, according to Lopez and colleagues, the process of utilization of fathers’ strengths as parenting requires the following components: continuous social support, the experience of being successful, and enhancement of personal strengths [24]. Among them, social support is the initial stage of the utilization of strengths, which was also evident in the present study. From this perspective, a series of educational programs need to be implemented for both caregivers to explore utilize their strengths.

Third, social recognition and conditions need to be changed for fathers’ participation in parenting. Of course, the awareness of fathers’ participation in parenting has increased compared to the past, but in fact, fathers still demonstrate difficulties in paying attention to or participating in child supporting due to practical limitations, for example, in their workplaces. In other words, efforts should be made to change social systems, resulting in reduced or flexible work hours, and longer and more autonomous maternity leave for fathers.

The study found that fathers with young children were able to play their roles more effectively in the process of utilizing their strengths in parenting. Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2006) found a similar result on adult awareness and utilization of strengths. In particular, fathers’ recognition that their spouses’ and children’s strengths are important too, along with their own is a meaningful finding for it can be used as a basis to build positive relationships among them.

#### 5. Conclusion

From the perspective of the positive psychology that emphasizes in-person comparisons, the study analyzed fathers’ experience in utilizing their strengths in fostering their young children through a series of interviews. The study would have found richer results should the participant fathers discovered and analyzed their strengths based on objective tools and experts’ observations. Thus, researchers interested in the further relevant topics are encouraged to develop a measuring scale that could confirm the strength and utilization of parents with young children and further research the development of parents’ education programs based on strengths.

This study is likely to help to explore the parent education method of the strength-based approach by providing basic data on fathers' strength and its utilization.

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